Apple-backed Kickstroid app gives sneakerheads the lowdown on those rare LeBron James kicks

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Around this time two years ago, David Alston was running around the frigid streets of Chicago attending sneaker release pop-up parties during

NBA All-Star Game weekend, trying to get some exposure for his upstart app, Kickstroid.

His pre-pandemic objective: letting sneakerheads know how and where to get the latest reissues of various Air Jordans, the newest "Space Jam: A New Legacy"-inspired Nikes from LeBron James, and a relaunched Adidas D Rose 1 from Chicago hoop legend Derrick Rose.

The positive feedback Alston got from users in person and on the app left him and his Kickstroid co-founder and college classmate, Nicco Adams, inspired. This weekend on their app, which launched in January 2020, they're tracking to see how the Nike "LeBron 9 Big Bang 2022" reissue will fare as this year's NBA All-Star Game is being held in Cleveland, James' former stomping ground. They say the shoe, with a $210 retail price, has a current "hype rating" of 7.2 (out of 10), a resell value of 4.6, which they also currently estimated at $284 and could price higher.

"That's even if you can find a pair. (James) probably won't even need to wear them to promote them during the game," Alston said Friday about the shoes. "The resell price will be incredibly volatile for the next few days as FOMO and the urge to overpay will start to kick in—until the next big shoe release drops."

About a year removed from getting "life-changing" advice from app developers at Apple and mentoring from longtime sneaker brand executives, Alston, 23, and Adams, 24, say they are determined to make it big with Kickstroid. Promoted as "The Smartest Sneaker App Ever," Kickstroid uses machine learning and user input to predict what's going to be the next dopest, rarest, and most expensive kicks, where to find them—and most importantly, how much they will cost?

They want to carve out a niche in a competitive marketplace that

includes well-known apps such as StockX, GOAT, Nike's SNKRS, Amazon and eBay to sneakerhead faves Sneaker Links, Sole Link and Sneakers N Stuff (aka SNS), to name a few. Overall, the sneaker industry could be worth up to $85 billion globally in 2022, according to data researcher Statista.

And the resale market is just as big. Research firm Piper Sandler's focus on StockX last year estimates the sneaker resell market is worth $10 billion in North America, and analysis by Cowen Equity Research last year estimated that the resale market could reach up to $30 billion worldwide by 2030.

While Kickstroid doesn't yet have as many downloads compared to its bigger counterparts, it may be off to a good start based on early user reviews. The app has a 4.4 out of 5-star rating on the Apple App Store. But Kickstroid has a very long way to go compared to the likes of GOAT which is ranked 15th in the top 1,000 apps in the "Shopping" app category in the App Store, according to Data.ai, the app tracker formerly known as App Annie.

In that same shopping app category, StockX was ranked at 16, Nike SNKRS at 18, and Foot Locker at 32, Data.ai reports.

Big support from Apple, industry vets

While it's not in the top 1,000 shopping apps yet, Kickstroid has major support from Apple. Last year, the tech giant selected Alston and Adams to participate in its inaugural Entrepreneur Camp for Black Founders and Developers. They were among 13 founders of Black-owned companies selected for the 10-day camp, which is part of Apple's $100 million Racial Equity and Justice Initiative (REJI) following the global aftermath of George Floyd's death in the custody of Minneapolis police last year.

Apple designed the program, and says on its website, to give developers like Alston, the opportunity to take their app experience to the next level by "mastering new technical skills, applying a critical lens to the user experience, and more through hands-on technology labs, one-on-one code-level guidance from Apple experts and engineers, and mentorship, inspiration, and insights from top Apple leaders."

In Kickstroid's case, Apple said the app's goal is to "help sneaker enthusiasts discover their favorite shoes with features they couldn't find in other sneaker apps, and provide a platform to build community among sneakerheads worldwide."

Apple helped Kickstroid by integrating its [machine learning](#) on its appThat allows for more user interaction on the app, Alston said, including sneaker battles, where users show off and vote on their favorite sneakers (imagine deciding on whether you like Kanye West's Adidas Yeezy Boost 350 or fellow rapper Travis Scott's interpretation of the Air Jordan 6).

Alston said as each user votes on a picture of a sneaker, its AI-based sneaker detection algorithm scans that sneaker photo, breaks it down by its visual characteristics (stitching or leather or nubuck). Those details can launch a big debate over which shoe is better, and shows users similar styles.

Machine learning also helps the site determine an estimated resale price for the model that can go up or down depending on user interest. Alston said he relished sitting side-by-side with Apple developers and technologists working to improve the back-end of the app to make it even more interactive.

He said several developers continue to keep in touch with them.

"They give a lot of support, They check on the progress we're making and see if there are any opportunities available to us," Alston said. "Every time we get a text from an Apple developer, it's a source of excitement to us."

Adams added, "The developers could sense what we wanted our vision to be and helped us package it all together. They continue to guide us when we need them. We're grateful for it."

As a result, Alston said he's seen users come back to the app multiple times a day as the average time is usually six minutes, a gradual increase from three minutes a year ago, he said.

That's a strong metric to build on, said Jason Brown, a chief marketing officer at NTWRK, a mobile-first video shopping platform targeting Gen Z and millennials, who serves as a mentor to Alston and Adams.

"The sneaker landscape is constantly changing and David and Nicco are witnessing it happen," said Brown, a former top marketing executive for Champs Sports, Foot Locker and PepsiCo. "They have the capabilities to merge cultures and subcultures through technological insights and data. I'm excited to see where this is going."

Alston said he became more drawn to sneaker culture after the release of actor/rapper Donald Glover's partnership with Adidas featuring sneakers that had a well-worn esthetic.

Alston knew his sneaker tastes were a bit different from those who like more flashy styles as he saw in various conversations on Reddit. Adams, who graduated with Alston at the University of Illinois, shared a similar interest. Now, they want to bring casual and diehard sneakerheads together.

"Everything feels really organic almost second nature," said Adams about the user interaction on the site. "We're not just jumping in, we're not having to force-feeding. Our users are driving the flow of the conversation."

Alston agrees.

"It's all about helping users find their passion and their fashion," Alston said. "We want to help those in the culture to be able to express themselves with what they are wearing."